

White Paper

Canadian Task Force to Combat Online Antisemitism

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MARCH 2022

CANADIAN TASKFORCE TO COMBAT ONLINE ANTISEMITISM



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Introduction

Antisemitism – the hatred of the Jewish people – has been identified as one of the oldest and most persistent forms of hatred in history. Incidents of antisemitism and hate crimes against Jews have increased in recent years across the globe, picking up speed since the start of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, reigniting conspiracy theories and serving as a focus of hate during times of uncertainty, both on and offline.

This rise in hate against Jews has historically been a sign of a larger social trend of widespread discrimination. In the words of Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations' (UN) Special Rapporteur on *Freedom of Religion or Belief*, antisemitism is “the canary in the coalmine of global hatred” – an oft-overlooked warning sign of worsening discrimination or burgeoning atrocities.¹

While the sources of hate can be confounding, in his 2021 remarks at the United Nations Holocaust Memorial Ceremony, the Honourable Irwin Cotler stated “... the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers, it began with words.”² This trend has been witnessed over the course of history and, with the prevalent use of social media and wide global access to online resources and fora, words have never had a wider reach.

Highlighting this danger, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated unequivocally that “all societies must take action to tackle antisemitism, root and branch.”³ This assertion is accompanied by the adoption of a resolution that condemns the denial and distortion of the Holocaust this past January 2022. The resolution touches on online and offline hate and stipulates the need for a collective approach of education, advocacy, and vigilance. The resolution states that the Holocaust will “...forever be a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism, and prejudice.”⁴

This white paper will explore antisemitism, online hate, and online antisemitism, how these social phenomena are being addressed by governments, social media companies and civil society and will conclude with recommendations on how best to address online antisemitism.

Methodology

This white paper is based on a review of academic literature, current media reports, public-facing government documents as well as public hearings and testimony relating to antisemitism and online hate in Canada and abroad. This paper also includes some of the main findings from the *Canadian Taskforce to Combat Online Antisemitism's* three digital roundtable discussions, organized by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) throughout October and November 2021 and January 2022, featuring:

October 6, 2021: *Current Trends Surrounding Online Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial and Distortion*

- Thomas Mulcair, Former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, Political Commentator, Visiting Professor at l'Université de Montréal
- Imran Ahmed, Founder & CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate
- Dr. Barbara Perry, Director of the Centre of Hate, Bias and Extremism
- Oren Segal, Vice President, Centre of Extremism, Anti-Defamation League
- Sacha Roytman-Dratwa, Chief Executive Director, Combat Anti-Semitism Movement
- Emmanuelle Amar, Director, Policy and Research, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs Quebec
- Heather Mann, Consultant, UNESCO
- Jonathan Bright, Senior Research Fellow, Oxford Internet Institute

November 17, 2021: *The Role of Social Media Companies in Combating Online Antisemitism*

- Dr. Catherine Chatterley, Editor in Chief, Antisemitism Studies
- Emmanuelle Amar, Director, Policy and Research, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs Quebec
- Guilherme Canela De Souza Godoi, UNESCO
- Dr. Gunther Jikeli, Professor, Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism
- Dr. Michael Geist, Law Professor, University of Ottawa
- Steve de Eyre, Director of Public Policy, and Government Affairs, Tik Tok Canada
- Peter Stern, Director of Content Policy Stakeholder Engagement, Facebook

January 12, 2022: *Developing a Whole-of-Society Approach to Building Canadian Resilience to Online Antisemitism*

- Hon. Irwin Cotler, Founder and Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism
- Shimon Fogel, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs
- Michael Levitt, President, and CEO of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center
- Heather Mann, Consultant, UNESCO

Antisemitism

Over the course of recent years, especially in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a global rise in hate speech and hate-related actions and violence.⁵ While the need to define hate might seem redundant when one need only glance at the news or see attacks online, in the streets and in places of worship, the complex and intertwined nature of hate, in this case targeting the Jewish people, is continuously evolving. As such, a clear definition and contextual understanding is essential to best address this persistent and dangerous trend.

While multiple definitions of antisemitism exist, in 2019 Canada adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition, which states:

*Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*⁶

IHRA is the only intergovernmental body solely committed to work on Holocaust-related issues.⁷ The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reflected on how defining antisemitism takes the input of a wide variety of dedicated experts, theorizing that this is because “...antisemitism contains features that are both similar and different from other forms of hate or prejudice, reflecting a long, complex and specific set of histories regarding Jewish and non-Jewish relations.”⁸ The ADL notes the paradoxical nature of antisemitism depicts Jews as at once being too strong and too weak, standing at the epicentre of all social problems:

*Jews have been blamed by racists for promoting racial equality and by racial minorities for promoting slavery and racism. Jews have been blamed by capitalists for preaching socialism and by socialists for alleged capitalist exploitation. Jews have been targeted by social conservatives for empowering sexual minorities and by queer activists for patriarchal conservatism... Across eras and cultures, these ideas about Jews have been used to justify exclusion, discrimination, violence, and genocide.*⁹

On the basis of these contradicting qualities, the ADL categorises antisemitic narratives according to the following thematic – and erroneous – classifications that have persisted throughout history:

- Jews have too much power;
- Jews are disloyal;
- Jews are greedy;
- Jews killed Jesus; and
- Jews use the blood of Christians for religious rituals.

The ADL notes that antisemitic tropes can also focus on Holocaust denial or distortion and the assertion that criticism of Israel is *never* antisemitic when some of it is the targeted replication of the above-mentioned five categories.

Online Hate & Online Antisemitism

Two competing truths exist in the realm of preventing or addressing mounting social discord: hateful narratives have underpinned many atrocities that have occurred throughout history; and free speech has served as a salve to heal oppression and ensure a free and fair society. Balancing these two truths has proven difficult for many democratic societies and has resulted in variable approaches ranging from minimal to robust restrictions to expressions. These challenges have only increased in complexity with the advent and uptake of social media, which has facilitated the broad sharing of ideas, information and opinions – the veracity and impact of

which have no bearing on their transmission, regardless of their national origins or local legislation.

While much has been said about free speech and its restrictions, online hate as well as how best to address it, the lack of an existing and shared definition of hate speech is one of the key challenges that must first be overcome.

Canada considers Freedom of Expression, defined as “...freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression...”, to be a fundamental right.¹⁰ However, there are limits to this freedom, if they can be shown to be “reasonable in a free and democratic society” including “...by laws against hate propaganda.”¹¹ Some of these are outlined in the 2013 Supreme Court ruling, *Saskatchewan v. Whatcott*, which states that:

*Hate speech is an effort to marginalize individuals based on their membership in a group. Using expression that exposes the group to hatred, hate speech seeks to delegitimize group members in the eyes of the majority, reducing their social standing and acceptance within society. Hate speech, therefore, rises beyond causing distress to individual group members. It can have a societal impact. Hate speech lays the groundwork for later, broad attacks on vulnerable groups that can range from discrimination, to ostracism, segregation, deportation, violence and, in the most extreme cases, to genocide. Hate speech also impacts on a protected group’s ability to respond to the substantive ideas under debate, thereby placing a serious barrier to their full participation in our democracy.*¹²

Although this definition is broad in scope, its practicality stumbles on its need to prove intent and future risk.¹³

To address this, theorists have proposed that elements be added. Benesch (2014), for example, suggests including forms of speech that are damaging to social cohesion and, as such, a re-classification of hate speech can include “inciting”, “harassing”, “discriminatory” or “damaging” speech to encompass these threatening forms of communication more fully.¹⁴ Usman et al. (2019) suggest a definition of hate speech that would include maintaining human dignity and allow for any regulations to focus on providing supports to vulnerable communities, in a consistent and proactive manner.¹⁵ Within these complex considerations, Hawdon et al. reflects on the functionality of hate speech being, in part, to recruit for a larger, more problematic offline effort and, as such, any definition and related approach must be cognizant of this goal.¹⁶

Social media has facilitated the spread of this speech online, with frightening risks to the safety of citizens worldwide. This is evidenced in online antisemitism and its recent rise. According to a 2021 survey conducted by the ADL, 36% of Jewish respondents reported experiencing online

harassment and 13% reported being physically threatened. Many users reported seeing repeated and hateful visual representations of the myths outlined in the antisemitism section above, such as the “Happy Merchant” (*Appendix 1*).

According to the ADL, “Antisemitism typically surges in times of political or economic uncertainty as well as rapid social change, often used as a tool of political manipulation or populist anger.”¹⁷ While Canada has not kept similarly detailed statistics, this trend has been anecdotally witnessed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, when these trends hit the internet, historic borders do little to offset transmission from country to country. This was evidenced during the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas, which saw 17,000 tweets that centered on a variation of theme that “Hitler was right”¹⁸ (*Appendix 2*). This was paired with an international increase in offline violent attacks on members of the Jewish community. Indeed, 2021 was reported as the worst year globally for antisemitic incidents in a decade, with an average of ten reported incidents per day.¹⁹

The ADL notes that there is a lack of understanding regarding antisemitism and its history throughout the world. For example, a recent report found that one third of Canadian and American students believe the Holocaust was fabricated or exaggerated. Although this shocking statistic can indicate a failure in the educational system, the accusation that the Holocaust is fabricated or exaggerated is a seminal antisemitic trope. These statistics are accompanied by antisemitic incidents across Canada. For example, in about a month, “Canada’s biggest school board has seen at least six events: from middle schoolers performing a Nazi salute in front of a Jewish teacher, to a hate-crimes investigation of three separate high schools being spray-painted overnight Wednesday with the same Nazi symbols.”²⁰ While education is recommended, this does not account for all those possessing these beliefs, unchecked and un-studied, outside of the educational system.²¹ Furthermore, it has been asserted that online antisemitism and the symbols thereof have normalized discriminatory behaviour.²² With this in mind, the ADL asserts doubt that people can “...effectively detect antisemitic tropes and stereotypes, whether overt or subtle.”²³ Accepting that antisemitism is the aforementioned canary in the coalmine, the well-being of society, as a collective, is at risk, so long as these trends go un-addressed.

Addressing Antisemitism Online

Interested parties across the world have turned their attentions to online hate and its implications. Ranging from governments to social media companies to civic partners, each group brings diverse viewpoints, interests, and capacities, in a bid to balance the protection of citizens with the need to respect the democratically enshrined right to Freedom of Expression.

Government

According to the annual Statistics Canada report, released in July 2021, police-reported hate crimes in metropolitan areas rose by 37% between 2019 and 2020, going from 1,951 to 2,669 reported incidents. This marks the largest increase since this type of data first became available in 2009. Violent hate crimes increased by 30% as compared with a 42% increase in non-violent crimes from the previous year, with a slight increase of overall reported cases (+15) against the Jewish community, maintaining its distinction as one of the most targeted groups in Canada. These numbers do not reflect the hate that diverse groups are experiencing online.

The Government of Canada has taken multiple steps to address hate, including antisemitism, both on and offline.²⁴ This has included the 2019 Federal government's adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism as well as the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights hearings on online hate, which were held in the same year. The hearings made the following thematic recommendations based on testimony from 59 academic, social media companies, not for profit and government representatives, along with 20 briefs:

- Formulate a clear definition of online hate;
- Provide funding for training on online hate for law enforcement, attorneys and judges;
- Share best practices regarding data collection and combatting online hate;
- Address the gap in data collection;
- Standardize tracking, track and store online hate for the purpose of analysis;
- Take actions to prevent online hate;
- Provide civil remedy; and
- Develop guidelines for online platforms on how to deal with online hate, transparency and reporting.²⁵

While many of the participants supported the recommendations, the submission is still awaiting response from the House of Commons.

That said, the federal government has assigned multiple departments to regulate social media companies and remove online harms, including radicalization, incitement to violence, child sexual exploitation and hate speech, as well as educate the population against mis- and disinformation. The ministries tasked with these issues are: Canadian Heritage, Public Safety, Innovation, Science and Economic Development and Justice.²⁶ Canadian Heritage is in the process of a coordinated drafting of a policy to regulate online harms.²⁷

As it looks towards regulation, the Government of Canada hosted the *National Summit on Antisemitism*, co-chaired by the Honourable Irwin Cotler, Canada's *Special Envoy for Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism*, along with the Honourable Bardish Chagger, Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. During this time, members of the Jewish

community shared their experiences and fears regarding online and offline violence against Jews.²⁸

The struggle to address antisemitism was highlighted during the “Freedom Convoy”, which occupied downtown Ottawa from the end of January 2022 to mid-February 2022. While it might have begun in reaction to COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates, it devolved into a periodically aggressive occupation that showcased antisemitic, fascist, and racist symbols, which went largely unaddressed by the organizers of the convoy. This was showcased both offline and online (Appendix 3). While these actions have sparked an NDP private members bill to ban hate symbols in Canada, as well as a Liberal study into the history and use of hate symbols, getting rid of emblems alone fails to address their underlying sentiment.²⁹

As the government reflects on current realities and priorities in addressing hate speech on and offline, Canada has considered the approaches of likeminded countries, including Australia, Germany, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, all of which, except for New Zealand, have adopted the IHRA working definition of antisemitism.³⁰

While it is unclear whether Canada is considering the approach put forward by the Israeli government, it is worth mentioning, as it is collaboration-focused and, uniquely, directly addresses online antisemitism. The 2021 joint report entitled *The Hate Factor: Government of Israel Policy for Combatting Online Antisemitism* proposes the following:

- Removing accounts convicted of promoting antisemitic hate speech;
- Enhancing the training of content moderators;
- Increasing efforts to identify and remove accounts for inauthentic coordinated behavior;
- Addressing the issue of “hate commerce” by creating global policy standards for the sale of items, including Nazi memorabilia;
- Increasing transparency in allowing the public to access data on hate speech;
- Monitoring hate speech according to the IHRA definition of antisemitism;
- Monitoring and identifying content published by propagators of antisemitism on social media;
- Monitoring antisemitic hate speech in specific languages, including alerting social media platforms to the gaps in policy enforcement in languages with higher antisemitic hate speech prevalence; and
- Monitoring viral campaigns in inauthentic accounts that seek to promote hate speech.³¹

Social Media

According to the ADL, “Social media platforms are unmatched vectors for the rapid spread of antisemitic content; a single tweet or post can reach millions of people in mere seconds and cause lasting harm that is difficult, if not impossible, to undo.”³² Over the course of much of their history, social media companies have been largely self-regulated. Many of them are based in the United States and are therefore minimally encumbered by restriction to free expression.

However, as the risk of sharing unchecked harmful speech has become more apparent and international governments have applied pressure, social media companies have enhanced their efforts to self-regulate, with varying levels of effectiveness.

In 2021, the ADL released its “Online Antisemitism Report Card.” It evaluated how Discord, Facebook, Instagram, Roblox, Reddit, TikTok, Twitch, Twitter and YouTube performed regarding the policies and actual enforcement relating to addressing online antisemitism.

The following is an overview of the results:

Online Antisemitism Report Card

PLATFORMS	HATE POLICY THAT EXPLICITLY MENTIONS RACE, RELIGION, OR ETHNICITY?	RESPONSE WITHIN 24-72 HOURS?	NOTIFICATION OF POLICY REASON FOR ENFORCEMENT?	ACTION TAKEN AGAINST A/S?	TRUSTED FLAGGER PROGRAM?	ACTIONED UPON TRUSTED FLAGGER REPORT?	EFFECTIVE PRODUCT-LEVEL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS ANTISEMITISM?	DATA ACCESSIBILITY GRADE	TOTAL GRADE
Twitter	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	B	B-
YouTube	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	C	B-
Reddit	Yes	No	No	No	No	N/A	Yes	B	C
Twitch	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	N/A	No	C	C
TikTok	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	F	C-
Facebook (including Instagram)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	D	C-
Discord	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	N/A	No	C	C-
Roblox	Yes	No	No	No	No	N/A	No	D	D-

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The average score was a C, with Twitter and YouTube receiving the highest grade of a B- and Roblox receiving the lowest score of D- for its poor data accessibility as well as for leaving up antisemitic content, despite trusted flaggers alerting it to the presence of dangerous speech.

While a robust discussion of all social media companies would be ideal, in the interest of brevity, this section will provide an overview of the approaches used by Meta (Facebook and Instagram, in this instance), Twitter, Google/YouTube, Reddit and TikTok.

Meta’s Facebook & Instagram

Facebook/Instagram³⁴ have been the focus of great attention over the years for accusations of sharing user data, influencing political activity, broadcasting violent hate crimes, permitting the sharing of unchecked hate speech and lacking transparency of action. This has been especially true in recent months, as two former Facebook employees came forward with claims that the company prioritized profit over user protection.

Sophie Zhang, a former data scientist at Facebook, testified before the British parliament that the company has permitted disinformation campaigns and has allowed authoritarian regimes to manipulate political discourse on its platforms.³⁵ She suggested that part of the problem was a

lack of resourcing for monitoring within the corporation. Zhang's testimony followed that of another former Facebook employee, Frances Haugen, who leaked tens of thousands of company documents to the Wallstreet Journal in September 2021. Haugen noted that Facebook supports and amplifies content that generates strong reactions, even if the content is problematic. She also stated that Facebook has fostered misinformation, hate speech and incitement to violence on their platform.³⁶ Haugen noted that "Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, they'll make less money."³⁷

Facebook/Instagram opposed these claims, indicating that they take their responsibility to safeguard society, while supporting free expression, seriously and are steadfast in their commitment to working with civic partners.³⁸ They have also noted that engagement on the basis of divisive speech does not benefit their bottom line.

Monika Bickert, Meta's Head of Global Policy Management stated that, "Not only does hate speech turn others off, but the people who post it may not be ideal money-makers for the company. Those people are not likely to click on an ad for shoes...in the middle of their hate. The person who is looking at puppy videos is a lot more likely."³⁹

Despite its best efforts, however, enacting these standards has proven difficult. Indeed, according to the ADL, which gave Facebook/Instagram a C- for its lack of action in hate speech removal as well as its poor transparency and data access, Facebook/Instagram was "slow to crack down on Holocaust denial...", if at all.⁴⁰

Facebook/Instagram might partially agree, as they have stated that hate speech monitoring is among the most difficult to moderate, with the language constantly changing. Furthermore in 2019, Mark Zuckerberg stated that he believes social media companies hold too much power in monitoring offensive communication and requested governmental regulation as well as oversight and the establishment of a standard and shared international definition of online hate.⁴¹

Twitter

While Twitter has faced its share of criticism for inaction relating to online hate, including during the May 2021 influx of 17,000 antisemitic tweets, it has taken several actions that have resulted in it receiving the highest grade granted by the ADL, a B-.⁴² This was due to its broad policies to address hate on its platform, its data accessibility, commitment to work with civil society experts, as well as its "effective product-level efforts to address antisemitism."⁴³

In her 2019 testimony to the Justice Committee's study on online hate, Michelle Austin, Head of Government and Public Policy in Canada, stated that "Under our hateful conduct policy, you may not "promote violence against or directly attack or threaten" people based on their

inclusion in a protected group, such as race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability or serious disease. These include the nine protected categories that the United Nations charter of human rights has identified.”⁴⁴

Austin also noted that they are proactively seeking content for removal, in addition to being responsive to user reports, both of which they attempt within 2 hours of receiving notice. Beausoleil (2019) noted that Twitter has self-regulated above and beyond that which has been imposed. Indeed, they “...released a statement explaining that the platform decided to amend its hateful conduct policy to proscribe content that dehumanizes members of a discernable group based on group membership, even in the absence of a specifically targeted individual. To justify its decision, Twitter referred readers to scholars who have recognized the link between dehumanizing language and increased violence.”⁴⁵ Austin also echoed Zuckerberg’s call for government regulation and clarity of definitions to help companies regulate hate speech of all types appropriately.

Despite the inroads made by Twitter, however, the ADL noted that the company was not responsive to ordinary user reports and, instead, favoured trusted flagger programs which may or may not catch what regular users do.

Google/YouTube

Recommendation algorithms are not specific to Google/YouTube. Indeed, they pose a threat to users of all social media outlets. However, Google/YouTube has historically been plagued by issues of video recommendations that lead to increasingly radical and dangerous content. According to the Counter Extremism Project (CEP), a 2021 study found that 71% of the videos reported by volunteers as being harmful were recommended by YouTube’s algorithm. CEP’s Senior Advisor, Dr. Hany Farid noted that “Algorithmic amplification is the root cause of the unprecedented dissemination of hate speech, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and harmful content online. Platforms have learned that divisive content attracts the highest number of users and as such, the real power lies with these recommendation algorithms.”

In the face of criticism, Google/YouTube took steps, as of 2017, to address speech that violates its terms of service quickly. According to its Canadian Head of Public Policy and Government Relations, Colin McKay, YouTube bans “content that promotes or condones violence against individuals or groups, based on race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, nationality, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. This extends to content whose primary purpose is inciting hatred based on these core characteristics. We enforce these guidelines rigorously to keep hateful content off our platforms.”⁴⁶ Google/YouTube has also opted to flag speech that is inappropriate but not violative and place it in a “digital purgatory”, where it does not benefit from the same features of regular content and receives a harmful content

warning.⁴⁷ McKay also requested a legislative approach with clear definitions of hate speech, in line with that suggested by Facebook/Instagram and Twitter.

While, according to Dr. Farid, Google/YouTube's actions have resulted in a 40% decrease in harmful recommendations, more must be done. The ADL would agree. While it scored Google/YouTube with its highest grade of B-, like Twitter, for its extensive anti-hate policies, efforts to address antisemitism and openness to work with civil partners, it had a slow response time to user reports and does not have the same level of accessible data as Twitter.

Reddit

Reddit has historically been viewed as somewhat unregulated, despite being guided by content policy, like other online companies. It bans sexually explicit, inciting, harassing, illegal, bullying, doxing and threatening content. Its enforcement of these terms, however, have been far less equivocating.⁴⁸ In an interview, Ellen Pao, former Reddit CEO, noted that minimal enforcement is by design, for fear it would affect the platform's appeal and, therefore, its bottom line.⁴⁹

In line with these issues, the ADL scored Reddit a C for its strong policy around hate and protections for marginalized groups, but noted it was not responsive to trusted flagger reports.

TikTok

In an October 2020 announcement regarding TikTok joining the optional *European Commission's Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online*, the company clarified its commitments to creating an open and safe space, by stating that: "We have a zero-tolerance stance on organized hate groups and those associated with them, like accounts that spread or are linked to white supremacy or nationalism, male supremacy, anti-Semitism, and other hate-based ideologies. We also remove race-based harassment and the denial of violent tragedies, such as the Holocaust and slavery."⁵⁰ To action its commitment, TikTok invested in the training of moderators to detect harmful speech and ensure that the evolving nuances are caught and addressed.

In 2021, TikTok reaffirmed its commitment and acknowledged the rise in antisemitism and the need to redouble its efforts to ensure its platform is free from hate, that its users are educated and marginalized voices, including those of their Jewish users, are amplified. Following their attendance at the *Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism*, they stated that "We condemn antisemitism in all its forms. We deploy a combination of technologies and moderation teams to remove antisemitic content and accounts from our platform, including Holocaust denial or any other form of hate speech directed at the Jewish Community."⁵¹

Despite these commitments, TikTok received the same C- as Facebook/Instagram, as it does not provide access to its data. Recently, however, TikTok did implement a product change, which allows “...mass user reporting and bulk blocking. These important tools empower users to respond to mass hate and harassment”. This contrasts with Facebook/Instagram that has an “opaque” approach to its data.⁵²

Civic Partners

Civic partners have played a key role in combatting hate speech. Their reflections and experience highlight the importance of taking action to address online antisemitism by identifying where the risks are and how best to mitigate them, from the ground up – something that governments and social media companies may miss or fail to consider.

As a part of the *Canadian Taskforce to Combat Online Antisemitism*, MIGS hosted three townhalls in October and November of 2021 and in January of 2022, to gain a better understanding of the scope of online antisemitism as well as the best ways by which to address it.

Speakers expressed concern over the trends of religious intolerance witnessed in Canada, such as that enshrined in Quebec’s ban on religious symbols, as well as the rise of antisemitic tropes being used to explain the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that 84% of the content flagged as antisemitic online did not generate responses from platforms, suggesting that while algorithms require training, the biggest issue in addressing online antisemitism is the commitment to do so by the parties involved.

It was asserted that legislating social media companies appears to be the most supported approach to addressing online hate. Concerns were raised about the feasibility of doing so, given that the majority of social media companies are based in the United States, and, as such, benefit from nearly unrestricted free speech laws. It was therefore asserted that effective legislation of social media companies must be conducted by Americans.

While this statement was acknowledged, it was proposed that what is prohibited offline should be equally prohibited online and that existent Canadian laws regarding Freedom of Expression and its limitations can and should be applied. “In other words, the issue of online hate is as much an equal rights principle as it is a free speech principle. It is about the need to protect people against demonstrable harm...It is about the rights of minorities to be protected against vilifying speech. This is an international treaty obligation, yet it is often excluded in these discussions.”⁵³

To address these issues, recommendations were put forward to:

- Implement a whole-of-government approach, in collaboration with civil society and social media companies;
- Implement the panoply of civil, criminal and administrative remedies, including the re-creation of Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which would deal with the communication of hate speech – an arguably missing piece to existent anti-hate speech laws;
- Proactively address antisemitism by ensuring that education systems build students’ resilience through awareness;
- Build inclusive education systems that foster and uphold human rights; and
- Respond effectively to antisemitism in educational settings by developing legislation procedures and reporting mechanisms, as well as providing sufficient training for educators.

In addition to these civic reflections, the *Inter-Parliamentary Task Force to Combat Antisemitism* (“the Taskforce”) conducted a 2020 consultation with civil experts in online hate and antisemitism from Australia, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Several experts identified the challenge of disinformation in this sphere, including Joel Finkelstein, director, and Co-Founder of the *Network Contagion Research Institute* (NCRI). The NCRI tracks the processes by which online information goes from fringe mentions to central themes to offline action. Finkelstein noted that:

...conspiratorial depictions of Jews are found in extremist communities online, often camouflaged as conspiracy theories about individuals, and that these theories are advanced during elections and key political points...Using data, the organization is able to show how individuals are “hot-boxed” on extremist platforms that then spillover onto mainstream social media platforms, and eventually into the real world, as seen in the case of QANON and the January 6, 2021 Capitol Hill riots.⁵⁴

This sheds light on the aforementioned assertion that antisemitism serves as a warning signal for more collective dangerous acts. Furthermore, it highlights how disinformation goes hand-in-hand with hate speech – the combination of which leads to dangerous consequences. As stated by Christopher Tuckwood, Executive Director of the Sentinel Project: “Hate speech loads the gun, but misinformation pulls the trigger.”

Some of the civic organizations’ recommendations to address online antisemitism were as follows:

- The wide adoption of the IHRA definition;
- A redefinition of online antisemitism as a human rights issue not a religious freedom issue;

- The adoption of the recommendations of the 2019 House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights;
- The establishment of a coalition of experts and those with direct experience;
- The creation of a Centre for Disinformation Defense, a third-party institution that would work with government agencies, civil society and law enforcement to collect data through monitoring disinformation online to help predict and prevent violent actions;
- An increase in monitoring of online antisemitism, along with an adaptive approach that can reflect the ever-evolving nature of hateful language;
- The implementation of a system of sanctions that governments can impose on companies outside of their jurisdictions that continue to provide unlawful content, despite warnings;
- An intergovernmental collaborative approach;
- A strong set of legal tools to combat hate speech online;
- Government-developed guidelines for platforms to address online hate speech;
- The establishment of an international network of trained volunteers to monitor platforms in different languages;
- The improvement of manual and automated processes for classifying hate; and
- The provision of resources and tools for those facing or fearing online attacks.⁵⁵

Recommendations

Taking the vast array of approaches and recommendations together, this white paper proposes the following:

Define and Implement a Collective Approach

Providing a common and accepted definition of hate speech and antisemitism has been a rallying cry of civic experts and social media companies alike. Indeed, whether one supports Germany's approach to combatting online hate or not, part of its strength is that it is based on existent and strong anti-hate speech definitions and laws. The same cannot be said for other countries including, but not limited to Canada, whose anti-hate speech laws walk a fine line between requiring proof of threat and impact of speech, to safeguard Freedom of Expression. While a noble and essential goal, it is difficult for social media companies to act on. Furthermore, the border-free nature of the internet renders the definition of hate speech of one country almost moot once it reaches online fora. While one of MIGS' roundtables recommended enforcing existent legal tools to safeguard the population from on and offline antisemitic content, their implementation can be clunky and slow in the face of the instantaneous nature of social media.

Currently, the IHRA working definition of antisemitism has been accepted by 33 UN member states, including Canada. While this is an excellent step, it will not move the needle on online antisemitism, unless it is housed in strong anti-hate laws, as applied online by a collaborative

transnational inter-governmental approach. It must also be overseen and enforced on social media companies.

Furthermore, it should be noted that while there has been considerable work relating to understanding what hatred of Jewish people is, little effort has been spent in identifying what a Jewish person is. While this may be a strange notion, this deficiency has left many potential partners among marginalized groups assuming that Jewish people are white individuals who have chosen to practice a religion that has been unpopular throughout history and not who they actually are a racialized group with distinct markers as well as cultural and religious practices.

A failure in this understanding has placed the Jewish population outside of cultural collaborative efforts and marginalized by groups with which they should be working on these collective human rights issues. This has led to the sidelining and dismissal of Jewish concerns, as was recently and anecdotally witnessed when popular television personality, Whoopi Goldberg, claimed that the Holocaust was not about race, but about one white group's inhumanity to another white group.⁵⁶ While she has since apologized and the importance of Holocaust education has been highlighted, the Jewish people have been considered a race before the Holocaust and are still defined as such, well after it. Therefore, to truly address online antisemitism, discussions about who Jews are must be added to any discussion about what hatred of them comprises.

Educate

It has been repeatedly recommended that education is the best way to address antisemitism at its source – to safeguard the population against online messages claiming that, for example, the Holocaust did not happen or is greatly exaggerated. Indeed, mandating educational components across all levels of schooling to ensure important aspects of history are taught is essential. However, doing so does not address the lack of understanding amongst those who are no longer school-aged and are often quite amenable to accepting, spreading, and acting on misinformation and hate speech – the adult population.

In addition to implementing scholastic requirements to educate school-aged children and young adults about minorities and their history, including Jews, Judaism, and the history of the Holocaust, it is recommended that programs be directed to working-aged and older adults as well. This can be done as a facet of onboarding programming at work, through the innovative use of social media platforms to elevate marginalized voices and direct users to specific content and through the introduction of diversity of content, currently being explored by Canadian Heritage, so that media programming includes diverse voices and experiences. This should be implemented in collaboration with multi-level governments, social media companies as well as with civic experts.

Collaborate and Oversee

Social media companies themselves have asked for guidance and clarity when acting against online hate. Indeed, addressing these issues was never the job of these unelected businesses. Their regulatory actions should, therefore, be overseen by publicly elected officials, working in consort with civic experts to reign in corporate actions, safeguard society and ensure that what is hateful offline serves as the standard for what is unacceptable online.

As a part of this collaboration and oversight, governments should collectively mandate transparency of approach and algorithms and require anonymized data sharing to ensure that dangerous actions can no longer hide behind misunderstandings and unchecked corporate prerogative.

Implement Recommendations

Multiple studies have been conducted within and outside of Canada as to the best ways to approach online hate and online antisemitism, the results of which are contained herein and focus on:

- Working collaboratively with other governments;
- Legislating social media companies;
- Collecting national data relating to antisemitism and hate activity on and offline;
- Taking actions to prevent antisemitism and hate on and offline;
- Providing civil remedy for victims of antisemitism and hate;
- Building a more inclusive and resilient society;
- Enforcing and/or strengthening laws;
- Increasing transparency; and
- Working collaboratively with local and international partners

Instead of conducting further studies, it is recommended that existent results be considered and implemented to move forward on this pressing issue.

Conclusion

For Canada to live up to its promise as a tolerant and multicultural society and to ensure social cohesion, positive and meaningful measures must be implemented to safeguard our collective online experiences, and counter antisemitism as well as Holocaust denial and distortion in the digital realm through defining, educating, and acting.

This must be done alongside international partners, civil society, and the technological sector to heed the warning signs of the canary in the coalmine that is antisemitism.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres warns:

We must remember:

How easily hate speech turns to hate crime.

How societies that have no room for diversity have no room for humanity.

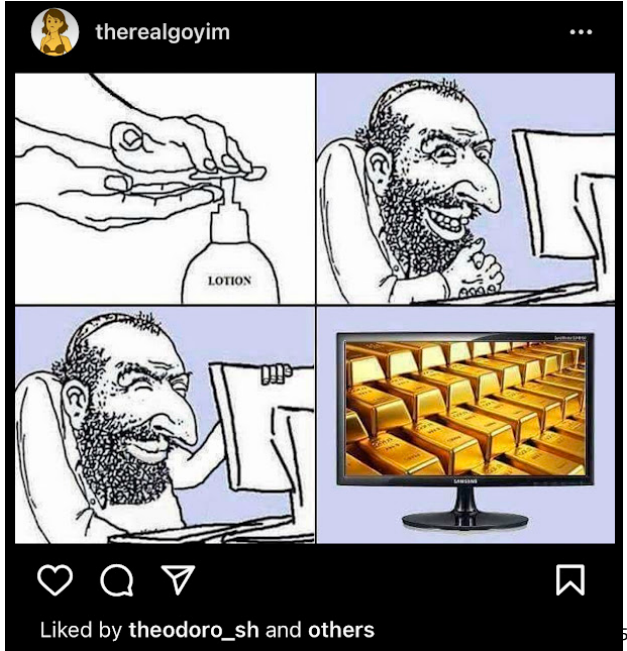
How silence in the face of bigotry is complicity.

Today and every day, let us commit never to be silent in the face of hatred, and never again allow the world to relive the horror of the Holocaust.⁵⁷

Appendix 1:

“The Happy Merchant”

Some of the oft-shared images have been embodiments of the “greedy” and “powerful” myths in the “Happy Merchant”, a stereotypical visual representation of a Jewish man grinning, while clasping his hands. He is often placed in a variety of degrading or threatening scenes as demonstrated below:



Appendix 2:

Examples of the 17,000 Tweets stating "Hitler was right" released during the 2021 Israel-Hamas conflict:

Veena Malik, a Pakistani actress with a verified account posted the following:



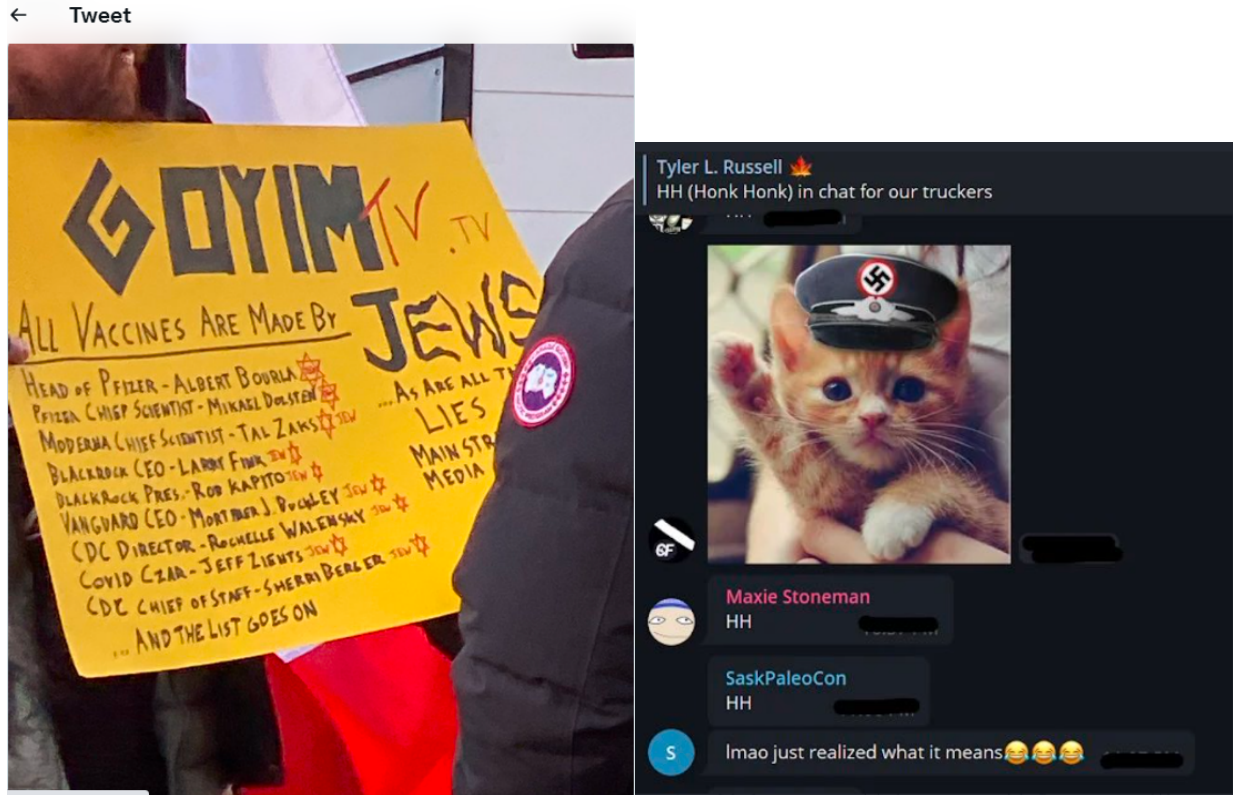
Similar posts mirrored this sentiment, including the following:



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Appendix 3:

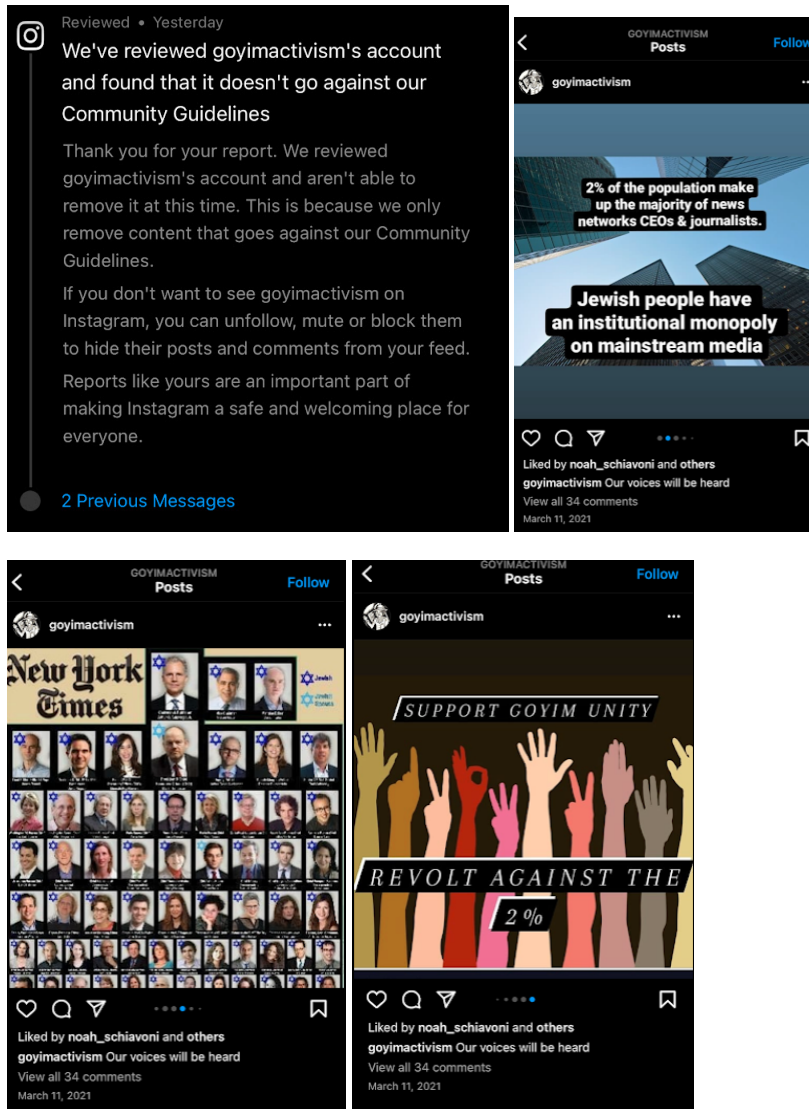
The lines have blurred between online and offline, with pictures from the 2022 “Freedom Convoy” being shared online, calling for further recruits. While the relationship between on and offline has been strictly correlative, anecdotal evidence suggests that the two are intertwined in some manner.



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Appendix 4:

The following image series anecdotally shows Meta’s lapse in taking action on reporting:



These images are from the account of “goyimactivism.”⁶² “Goyim” is the Yiddish word for a non-Jewish person and has been repurposed by white supremacist circles with hashtags like “#goyimlivesmatter.” It is used as a rallying space for white power and against the Jewish population. As can be seen on these Instagram posts, Meta did not believe this page violated its Community Guidelines, although it appears to, as the posts reference the antisemitic trope that Jews control the media and encourages a “revolt” against the Jewish minority, which may be violent. It also includes a hand symbol conventionally-linked to white power (index and thumb finger together with three fingers raised).⁶³

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